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IT'S A MOD, MOD, MOD, MOD WORLD

HOW TO SEE L.A.'S MID-CENTURY MASTERWORKS. PLUS WHERE TO EAT, SHOP, AND CATCH A FLICK

In the 1950s and '60s, the still largely undeveloped terrain of greater Los Angeles was a playground for avant-garde architects. They embraced the mid-century modern style (it was then just "modern"), drawing inspiration from Hollywood's vision of the future as well as the region's year-round warm weather. The result blurs the line between indoors and out, with wild uses of glass, wood, and metal, and forms ranging from minimalist to out of this world. For a crash course in the aesthetic, take in the sweeping modernism exhibition running this month through March 25 at the **Los Angeles County Museum of Art**, "California Design, 1930-1965: Living in a Modern Way"—highlights include the entire contents of Charles and Ray Eames's living room (323-857-6000). Next, hit the streets. Remnants of the period can be seen throughout L.A., and a full-day mid-century driving tour can be a thrilling trip back in time. For a more relaxed pace—and lower level of road rage—divide the tour into two or more days.

Start in Inglewood with a breakfast of waffles and fried chicken at **1 Pann's**. Built in 1958 by the firm Armet & Davis (dubbed the Frank Lloyd Wright of coffee shop architects), this Southern-style diner is an intact Googie wonderland—think the Jetsons meets Denny's (6710 La Tijera Blvd.; 310-670-1441; entrées, \$9-\$13). Take I-405 north through the Santa Monica Mountains, then head east on the Ventura Freeway to North Hollywood and **2 Midcentury LA**, a 12,000-square-foot warehouse piled to the ceiling with Scandinavian furniture of the era. Owner David Pierce imports teak sideboards, shag rugs, and

swag lamps, and offers amazing deals (5333 Cahuenga Blvd.; 818-509-3050). Hop on Route 134 East to the trendy Eagle Rock neighborhood and **3 Oinkster**, a revamped vintage burger shack now serving "slow" fast food like pastrami, pulled pork, and purple milk shakes made with ube (2005 Colorado Blvd.; 323-255-6465; sandwiches, \$7-\$10).

One enclave over, down the Glendale Freeway, is Silver Lake, the premier laboratory for some of the period's biggest architects. On Saturdays, the public is invited to check out the solar-powered window louvers and sci-fi floating staircases at the **4 Neutra VDL House**, one of the final projects by the great Richard Neutra. The funky furnishings have seen better days, but not to worry: The house is undergoing a painstaking rehabilitation effort by Cal Poly Pomona (2300 Silver Lake Blvd.; neutra-vdl.org; 30-minute tour, \$10). Sharing the same street is the highest concentration of Neutra homes in the country. Most are private, but the exteriors show off the master's signature style. The hood is also home to high-end furniture stores that specialize in mid-century modern, including **5 Lawson-Fenning** (1618 Silver Lake Blvd.; 323-660-1500) and **6 Danish Modern LA** (3028 W. Sunset Blvd.; 323-893-5950).

Keeping an eye out for kitschy retro signs at the roadside motels and bars, creep down Sunset Boulevard toward Hollywood to catch an afternoon flick at the **7 Cinerama Dome**. Now part of the upscale Arclight theater complex, the space-age concrete dome was built in 1963 to screen the faddish Cinerama format, a concave variation of wide-angle. Since then, it has hosted hundreds of celebrity-studded

premieres—from *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World* in 1963 to *Hall Pass* in 2011 (6360 W. Sunset Blvd.; 323-464-1478). When the sun goes down, wind your way up Laurel Canyon Boulevard toward the **8 Stahl House** for an evening tour. Don your best vintage frock and re-create the Julius Shulman photograph that made an icon of this 1959 Pierre Koenig cantilever home teetering over the glittering cityscape (1635 Woods Dr.; 323-744-1635; 90-minute tour, \$45, with a two-person minimum; reservations required). Killer views are also served up at the **9 Goldstein Residence**, in Beverly Hills. Designed by John Lautner in 1963, this spectacularly angled house with retractable glass walls that hang precipitously above Benedict Canyon takes groovy to new heights (310-785-9500; visits by special arrangement only).

Culver City is home to **10 A-Frame**, an IHOP turned "gourmet picnic" restaurant by Roy Choi, the guy behind the Korean taco truck phenomenon Kogi. Here, beneath the famous peaked roof, a young crowd noshes peel-and-eat shrimp and Beer Can Chicken (12565 Washington Blvd.; 310-398-7700; entrées, \$11-\$50). End your night at the **11 Avalon Hotel**, which Marilyn Monroe called home in the late '40s and early '50s (it was then the Beverly Carlton). Redone in 1999, its rooms still smack of Rat Pack style. Do your best *Mad Men* impression with a stiff nightcap beside the glowing, kidney-shaped pool (310-277-5221; doubles, \$192-\$270).

Appetite for modernism not yet satiated? Pick up Thomas S. Hines's enthralling *Architecture of the Sun: Los Angeles Modernism 1900-1970* (Rizzoli, \$95).

—LESLEY SUTER

